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SUBJECT: POSITIVE JORDANIAN REACTION TO G-8 REFORM PLAN  
TEMPERED BY REGIONAL TURMOIL

REF: A. SECSTATE 106755

[1](#)B. AMMAN 03227

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (U) Embassy Amman has continued its consultations with Jordanian government officials and civil society leaders on the G-8 reform plan (refs). Feedback has been constructive, highlighting weaknesses of the civil society movement and Jordanian government strictures that could affect reform initiatives in Jordan. Contacts also offered ideas to strengthen the specifics of the G-8 plan. However, our interlocutors continue to emphasize that regional turmoil and related growing anti-U.S. sentiment will make it nearly impossible for the proposals to gain traction unless people perceive substantial improvement in the Iraq and Palestinian situations. End Summary.

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WEAK NGOS AN ISSUE  
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[1](#)2. (U) Several civil society leaders told us that it would behoove G-8 reform planners to develop a mechanism to prevent recalcitrant government officials from slowing the pace of progress or stifling initiatives by civil society because they fear criticism or encroachment on what they see as their prerogatives.

[1](#)3. (U) Our contacts worry that obstacles currently facing civil society organizations in Jordan could adversely impact implementation of the plan's ideas. In Jordan, complicated procedures make it nearly impossible for new organizations to register with the government. The inclusion of government officials on their boards compromise their independence and undermine credibility with citizens. They say that NGOs are generally unable to raise funds and many of their administrators lack organizational and communication skills, and resources (e.g. computers and other communications equipment) needed to mobilize constituents.

[1](#)4. (U) They note that civic organizations tend to run into cultural barriers when they try to raise funds from private individuals locally. One activist complained that for years foreign donors have refused to give money for infrastructure or training of the civic organizations themselves, dictating that their money instead be used for specific activities, such as holding conferences. They urged more capacity-building for NGOs, whether in the form of training or outright financial support or donations of office equipment, for example, that would in turn strengthen the groundwork in Jordan for implementation of the G-8 plan. To avoid local NGOs becoming "addicted" to foreign funding, one activist suggested that holding workshops on private fundraising or relying on volunteers will help ensure that new organizations are solidly rooted in their communities.

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CHALLENGE IS TO IDENTIFY, BOLSTER TRUE REFORMERS  
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[1](#)5. (U) One contact noted that until now the public has had two bad choices: fundamentalism and corrupt secular leaders. It is important that the G-8 reform plan help strengthen the "third alternative" -- reformers. Along this vein, activists say there is a strong need for civic organizations to cooperate with independent media so they can reinforce each others' independence and monitor corruption in the public and private sector.

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LOOKING FOR AN EXPANDED "FORUM OF THE FUTURE"  
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[1](#)6. (U) Activists reacted favorably to the Forum for the Future, but say there should be parallel meetings for civic organizations combined with plenaries through which NGOs and other independent forces in the region could provide input to the Forum's deliberations and recommendations for action.

17. (U) One contact in the Prime Minister's office (who acknowledged her bias since she may soon assume the role of assistant to Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa in Cairo) made a pitch for inviting the Arab League Secretary General to the Forum's meetings as an observer. She says this coordination may help bolster the League's role in advocating reform in the Arab world beyond mere declarations and recommendations.

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DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE GROUP COULD CONNECT REGIONAL REFORMERS  
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18. (U) The NGO representatives liked the idea of a Democracy Assistance Group that could serve as a clearinghouse for information, enable reformers to share "lessons learned," and assist them in developing joint activities. Above all, they saw a need for regional coordination and dialogue in facing common challenges among Arab countries. At present, one NGO activists said, there are too many people "flying off in different directions," and not benefiting from each others' experiences or avoiding duplication of efforts.

19. (U) The official from the PM's office argued for a mechanism to coordinate the various components of the G-8 plan, such as the Democracy Assistance Group and the Forum for the Future. As plans move forward, it will become important that each group has the opportunity to hear about and discuss the others' plans and accomplishments. As an aside, FM Muasher told the Ambassador he was pleased the "Foundation for Democracy" idea had fallen by the wayside because he thought it would have been negatively perceived as a "watch dog" organization to impose Western-style ideas on the region.

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SUPPORTING FREE AND TRANSPARENT ELECTIONS KEY  
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10. (U) There was widespread agreement that outside assistance is needed to monitor elections in the region, either through support and training for the media, or through technical assistance to the election organizers themselves.

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TRAINING IS VITAL, BUT DON'T FORGET RETIRED MILITARY  
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11. (U) The Prime Ministry official noted that training the various groups mentioned -- including teachers, youth, judges, and women -- is vital. However, she believes that one important group is missing: retired military and other government personnel. She said that the majority of them are still young, disciplined, qualified, and seeking jobs. Reaching out to this group will help the credibility of the programs in Arab societies.

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ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENT, VIOLENCE WILL HINDER PROGRESS  
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12. (U) Our interlocutors are increasingly concerned that the poisoned political atmosphere stemming from the festering Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Abu Ghreib prison scandal, and ongoing violence in Iraq is a growing stumbling block to implementing badly needed reform plans in the region. Not only does it provide an excuse to reluctant governments to delay movement on reform but it also reinforces the public's perception that the U.S. (under the guise of the G-8) is pushing reform as a means to distract people from the "real" issues in the region. For this reason, it also makes it difficult for reformers to speak out publicly on issues, at a time when such dialogue is badly needed.

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